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SUBJECT: CZECH GREENS: A REFRESHING CHANGE FROM THE  
POLITICS OF SMOKE-FILLED ROOMS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In recent weeks the Czech Green Party has, for the first time ever, jumped above 5% in opinion polls, indicating that the party could enter parliament in the June 2-3 general election. A fifth party in the new parliament would change the calculations for the forming a new government. The Greens have ruled out cooperation with the Communists, but are otherwise willing to work with any mainstream parties. The Czech Greens occupy a more centrist position than many other European Greens; in addition to opposition to nuclear power, their signature campaign platform will be support for good governance and transparency. They are not likely to make foreign policy a significant element of their campaign. End Summary

¶2. (U) Although the Czech Greens were founded in 1990, they have not yet played much of a role in Czech politics. They received 2.4% of votes in the 2002 parliamentary elections, their best ever showing, and do have one member, Jaromir Stetina, in the Senate, as well as many officials at the local level. But too often the party has chosen activists rather than administrators for leadership positions. The result was a series of bickering unprofessional politicians that never succeeded in pulling the party into the big leagues. That changed with the appointment of Martin Bursik as party chair in September, 2005. Bursik, who is a former Minister of the Environment, has brought discipline, confidence, and gravitas and the party is being taken more seriously than ever before.

WARM FEELINGS FOR THE U.S.

¶3. (U) Acting DCM and Poloff met March 15 with Petr Stepanek, Green's Deputy Chair and currently a Prague city councilman; Stepanek nominally has responsibility for foreign affairs, although he spent most of our conversation on other matters. Stepanek, who arrived at the restaurant by bicycle (a rare feat in Prague in winter), insisted on paying for his own lunch, immediately setting himself apart from the typical Czech politician. Bursik and Stepanek both have ties to the United States. Bursik went to the U.S. in 1990 on a USAID grant to work in the offices of Representative Jim McDermott, from the 7th District in Washington State (Seattle and Sea-Tac); Bursik has previously told the Embassy the experience changed his life. Bursik's mother was a translator who used to do contract work for the US Embassy. Stepanek is married to an American, travels there regularly to visit his in-laws, and knows the U.S. and its politics extremely well. Among other freelance work, Stepanek works as an advisor on USAID-funded local governance projects in Macedonia and Montenegro.

DOES GREEN GO BETTER WITH BLUE OR ORANGE?

¶4. (SBU) The most pressing question for the Greens right now

is whether to support an ODS-led government under the blue banner, or a CSSD administration under the orange. Bursik is publicly refusing to choose sides, preferring instead to publish the party's program and offer himself to whichever partner supports the greater share of his party's policies. Stepanek told us the Greens will not deal with any government that includes, or is supported by, the Communists, but is otherwise ready to work with either ODS or CSSD. He also indicated the Greens could support a minority government (of either CSSD or ODS), and would be prepared to use the annual budget vote as a way of making sure that their program priorities are supported.

15. (SBU) Asked which priorities the Greens will put on the table if/when they enter into coalition negotiations, Stepanek offered a list that generally defies ideological categorization. One of their main themes is clean governance. They want to eliminate the current lifelong immunity enjoyed by parliamentarians, prevent immediate relatives of state officials from holding positions in state-run firms, and establish more extensive asset disclosure regulations. They would also like to see direct popular elections of mayors, provincial governors, and the president.

16. (SBU) Bursik explained that the Greens are not an ideological force. He says the party sees specific problems and proposes solutions. They would, for example, promote greater assistance for the handicapped, the regulation of prostitution, an end to entrance exams for middle and high school, and a ban on tractor-trailer trucks on highways over the weekend. Either CSSD or ODS could address some of these problems without alienating core constituencies. So it should not be assumed that the Greens will look to the left-of-center Social Democrats as the only potential partner.

17. (SBU) Of course, energy policy will be a central campaign theme. The Czech Republic gets approximately 35% of its electricity from two nuclear plants, at Dukovany and Temelin, near its southern border with Austria. The main political parties have all expressed an interest in adding two more reactors to the existing plant at Temelin, a position that is likely to gain popular support as concerns grow about energy security. However, the Principal Deputy Chair of the Greens, Dana Kuchtova, is a founding member of the anti-nuclear NGO, Mothers Against Temelin, and has stated on televised campaign events that the Greens are not only against expanding Temelin, but would also like to end the use of nuclear power altogether. Stepanek admitted that the nuclear position would be a tough part of any coalition negotiations, but did not believe it would be an insurmountable barrier. He expected there would be much more agreement on the question of increasing reliance on alternative technologies.

18. (SBU) Stepanek said foreign policy would not be a priority for the Greens. Asked about support for NATO, he said the Greens (like both ODS and CSSD) readily acknowledge NATO as the basis for the nation's defense. The Greens are strongly pro-EU, a stance that could create problem in cooperation with ODS (Stepanek pointed to the ODS support for a flat tax as another stumbling block). The Greens would push for foreign policies that support sustainable development. But generally, Stepanek saw few areas of disagreement with current Czech foreign policy.

CAN YOU BELIEVE THE POLLS?

19. (SBU) The party's detractors argue that the Greens probably will not make it to parliament, and even if they do, they will have trouble finding willing coalition partners. Marek Benda, a former student leader and current parliamentarian with ODS, told the Embassy he thought the Greens were, with the exception of Bursik and a few others, &a bunch of idiots.<sup>8</sup> Benda labeled some party members as &activists, Troskyites and hippies,<sup>8</sup> and argued that no serious party would want to form a partnership with such people. He said the Greens were, &unacceptable partners.<sup>8</sup>

¶10. (SBU) Other skeptics compare the Green's current polling success (over 9% support in a poll released on March 17) with that of the Retired Peoples' Party in 2002. That party saw a dramatic surge to 11% just before the elections, but finished under 2% and went into obscurity. Stepanek rejects the comparison, pointing out that the Greens have are an established party (founded even before ODS) and have for years been successfully fielding candidates in local elections. He argues that the Greens are a legitimate party with a full election program and not just some hodge-podge of extraparlimentary movements cobbled together just before an election in the hope of attracting 5% of the electorate. Others note that the party has the support of former President Vaclav Havel.

#### A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: Czech voters have traditionally seemed to prefer a fifth party in parliament beyond the "big four" (CSSD, ODS, Communists, and Christian Democrats). The liberal Freedom Union (US-DEU) currently fills that role, but is not expected to cross the 5% threshold. Continuing personality divisions among the small liberal parties seem likely to prevent the emergence of a viable liberal alternative this year, lending support to the conclusion that the Greens will be the beneficiary of protest votes. If the Greens do make it to parliament and into government, we do not, at this point, expect them to insist on policy measures that will, on balance, harm U.S. interests. In fact, their passion for transparency and ethics could provide a much-needed breath of fresh air in Czech politics.  
CABANISS